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**Christmas AD 1949 and AD 1**

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**Your Life Your Health**

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Life and health is filled with memories. One of my favorite books is a children's story about Christmas entitled, *The Christmas Collie*. If you have never read it, you should. It is about a father who gives his son a puppy for Christmas **before** World War II, and then the son gives his son a puppy **after** World War II. The story always brings tears to my eyes and warmth to my heart. Have you learned that there are two emotions which contribute to your mental and physical health; they produce tears and laughter.

One of the great joys of Christmas is remembering. My family has work at creating Christmas memories which enrich our lives. We often sing, "Over the hills and through the woods, to grandmother's house we go" – have you ever notice that we never go to grandfather's house – it's always grandmother's house. No matter how much we love our grandfathers, hearth and home are always identified with grandmother. I think it is that way all over the world.

Children and even adults are excited at Christmas time about gifts which can simply be fun and soon forgotten, or they can reflect the values of the giver and the importance of the recipient to the giver, while also teaching a lesson. When I was in the first grade at Tioga, Louisiana, the school bus only brought my brother and me to within two miles of our home. Everyday, my mother picked us up to take us home. I wish I could say that I walked those three miles, in the snow, bare-footed, up-hill, both ways, but "unfortunately" I had a mother who was there every day I came home from school from the first grade through the twelfth.

I particularly remember Christmas of 1949. When mother picked us up the day Christmas vacation started, she said we had a surprise at home; our family's Christmas present had been delivered early. As only a six-year old could, I exclaimed, "I'll tear the house down to find it." My mother was a serious person and let me know quickly that such behavior would not be tolerated.

Part of our excitement was that, until this Christmas, presents were few and small. We didn't know we were poor, but we were. Now, however, the post-World-War-II boom had begun. It had reached central Louisiana. My father had a good job and Christmas was going to be bright. We couldn't wait to get home.

When we arrived, deep in the woods of Camp Livingston, where we lived in a two-bed-room, Louisiana Power and Light-company house, which we shared with another family, my brother and I raced into the house. There in the living room sat the most beautiful piece of furniture we had ever seen, and it talked. It was a large radio in a beautiful wooden cabinet.

No one had a television, a circumstance which I would now count a blessing, so this radio became the center of our entertainment, amusement and education from the outside world. As I look back, I realized that in purchasing this gift my father was making a statement about what was important to him and what he wanted to be important for his family. This gift opened up a new world to a country child, who knew so little of the city that crowds of a few hundred were frightening. This gift taught me to love music, news and learning. It taught us to laugh and to listen. It taught us that laughing was not fun unless it was shared with those whom you love.

Another Father gave a gift on Christmas to His children through which He expressed His values, how important His children are to Him, and through which He taught a great lesson to His children. That was our Heavenly Father, Who on the first Christmas Day gave us the Gift of His Son, Jesus, Who is called, the Christ.

In His Gift, the Father taught us what He values – purity, love, gentleness, kindness, joy, peace. In His Gift, the Father taught us how much He loves us; He gave us His Son. And, in His Gift, God, the Father, taught us what we should value. God's Gift was not given for us simply to look at. Speaking of the Gift of Jesus, I John 1:1 declares: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled." Every sense was employed in appreciating the Gift from the Father: sight, sound, smell, touch and even taste was involved, as the Scripture declares, "taste and see that the Lord is good." (Psalm 34:8; I Peter 2:3)

Gifts are tools for teaching. Oh, gifts should bring joy and wonder, but they should also reflect our values. God's Gift taught us the lesson of caring enough to subordinate our interests to the interests of others. God's Gift taught us that success is not found in survival, but in surrendering to God's Gift of love, peace and joy. God's Gift taught us that to get, you must give, and happiness is only found in sharing, even when it means sacrificing.

Now, as we purchase gifts for giving, let us reflect our values, which are not found in the limits on our credit card accounts, but which are found in what is important to us in life. In our gifting, let us declare to others how important they are to us, not because of the debt we accumulate in buying things for them, but in our willingness to live for them. In our gifting let us teach others to love, to give, to believe, because they see us loving, giving, believing. Let us remember that the gifts that last the longest are the gifts we GIVE to others.

And, if we do all of this, Christmas 2013 will be like my family's Christmas of 1949 and like God's Christmas of 1 AD. And, that is good. Merry Christmas to you all!! And, if in your belief and tradition, Christmas is not celebrated, know that our love and human family includes you too. And, know that we who celebrate Christmas as an act of faith, welcome you into our hearth and home. We welcome you into our hearts and into "grandmother's house." We welcome you to share the warmth and joy of this season which to us is holy.